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Elizabeth A. Fraser, *Mediterranean Encounters: Artists Between Europe and the Ottoman Empire, 1774-1839*. University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017. 300 pp. \$89.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-271-07320-0.

Review by Roger Benjamin, University of Sydney.

This fine new book invites the admiration of those who value superb scholarship and a presentation worthy of bibliophilic tradition. It is, I believe, the first systematic study of the grand illustrated travel book as a vehicle for the propagation of ideas about exotic cultures—Orientalism if you will. In this, Elisabeth Fraser builds upon a number of previous articles in which she investigates the neglected area of the travel book, working methodologically between print and book studies, visual culture, and art history.

The temporal span of *Mediterranean Encounters* covers, in French terms, the *ancien régime*, the Revolution, and post-revolutionary periods, and in Ottoman terms, the fortunes of a Sultanate itself in throes of modernisation under great personalities like Selim III through the Greek War of Independence. This bi-cultural optic is unusual, and shows the author moving with great learning between the histories of both nations/empires. Fraser actively seeks out (in common with art historians of later 19<sup>th</sup>-century Euro-Ottoman exchanges like Mary Roberts, Zeynep Celik, or Edhem Eldem) the dynamics of Ottoman imperial agency through commissions, cross-cultural collaborations, and transcultural perspectives. She is an admirer of Edward Said and Mary Louise Pratt, while her sources among Ottoman historians include Virginia Aksan and Natalie Rothman.

The book's substance is five in-depth accounts of major publishing undertakings, each considered within a tradition and a social practice linked to the Enlightenment search for knowledge. Yet the aesthetic aims in each case exceeded those of the Napoleonic *Description de l'Égypte*, the scholarly and scientific standard case against which these five books are sometimes compared.

The first study concerns the *Voyage pittoresque dans la Turquie et la Grèce*, by the Comte de Choiseul-Gouffier, the young scion of a celebrated line of French aristocrats. Choiseul-Gouffier travelled with his employee, the artist Jean-Baptiste Hilaire, to the Levant in 1776 and published the first volume of this physically imposing work in 1782. Hilaire's magnificent drawings of Greece and Turkey, even when interpreted by skilled engravers, retained a delightful late-Rococo lightness of touch.

Fraser uses the practice and methods of Choiseul-Gouffier as the standard against which books in subsequent chapters are measured. Choiseul-Gouffier was a wealthy and well-connected cultural entrepreneur who, partly in recognition of the resounding success of the initial tome of the *Voyage pittoresque*, was appointed French Ambassador to the Ottoman Court from 1784 for a period of eight years. From his Istanbul base Choiseul-Gouffier overcame fraught conditions, having irregular *livraisons* printed by Didot in Paris sent to subscribers, to be finally bound into three volumes dated 1782, 1809, and 1822 (the last being posthumous). Text was less important than the image: in the 1782 book, 126 plates take

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up most of the 204 pages. The text by Choiseul-Gouffier is for Fraser a “protophilhellenic dissertation on the political advantages to France of commercial and political influence in the Near East” (p. 27).

I detect a slight aversion by Fraser to the cartographic and topographical materials in books like Choiseul-Gouffier’s, actually “studded with maps,” in preference for the picturesque aesthetic of the landscape views. Too few such images are reproduced here, which counts against understanding the role such books played in military and archaeological intelligence.

Mindful of the storyteller’s need to vary her *dramatis personae*, Fraser’s second chapter deals with a figure introduced as “subaltern”: a petit bourgeois from the provinces who showed a precocious talent for drawing as a child and who won local support to be sent to Paris for training. Louis-François Cassas launched his career as a virtuoso draftsman hired by Choiseul-Gouffier, and was paid to travel extensively in the Levant and the Near East.

Drawing from the artist’s private correspondence, Fraser shows Cassas as ambitious to use the treasure of some 250 detailed landscape drawings he had obtained, sometimes at risk to life and limb, not just to furnish images for the Count but make his own grand book on the model that had made Choiseul-Gouffier famous. Fraser argues convincingly that in the transformative social context of the French Revolution, Citizen Cassas could evince his rivalrous ambition by exceeding the achievements of his erstwhile lord.

While Fraser’s readings of the images are generally acute, I would have welcomed a more critical eye to the freight of European pictorial conventions. In some of Cassas’s Syrian views, landscapes resemble the Roman campagna, with “Arabs” assimilated to *banditti*. Fraser is right to dwell on the strangely-scaled male figures whom Cassas inserted as a new kind of staffage for his grand architectural ruins. Surely his employment of these heavily built, classically-poised male types—more rugby-men than svelte Bedouin—owes a lot to Michelangelo of the Sistine Chapel, even down to an implausible headgear that looks like the cloth bonnets of the Damned. Fraser draws the conclusion that, against the tropes of Orientalism, Cassas was rendering the present-day inhabitants of the Holy Lands as heroes (even though in his writings he does little but denigrate them). She is ever alert to the *décalage* between text and image.

Taking advantage of a lacuna in Choiseul-Gouffier’s program of visual exploration, Cassas published no fewer than two dozen engravings of the temple complexes at Palmyra and Baalbek. These meticulous views, plans and sections, now two centuries old, take on added value given the recent ravages at Palmyra by the criminal dynamiters of ISIS.

Bringing new archival and documentary material to light is a hallmark of Fraser’s admirable scholarship (as she proved in her 2004 book *Delacroix, Art, and Patrimony in Post-Revolutionary France*).<sup>[1]</sup> In *Mediterranean Encounters* she delves into the archive in an laudable way, providing for each lead artist—Choiseul-Gouffier, Cassas, Mourad d’Ohsson, Antoine-Ignace Melling, and Louis Dupré—all the attention to correspondence, archival and biographical research one would expect of a major painter. The preserved archives for Choiseul-Gouffier, Cassas, and Dupré seem enormous as were the budgets required for their great collective productions, all of them funded by costly subscriptions. Dozens of subscriptions were taken out by French government agencies, aristocrats, and diplomats as well as wealthy amateurs of the luxury book. Fraser’s analysis of the economics of the art-book of that era is one of the most salutary parts of her enquiry.

The most intriguing individual presented here is the dragoman (interpreter and facilitator) known as Mourad d’Ohsson. “Ignatius Mouradgea, born Moutadcan Tosunyan, ennobled as Chevalier d’Ohsson,” is described by Fraser as an “Ottoman native, Franco-Armenian Catholic, Swedish subject, dragoman, diplomat and learned scholar” (p.126). As such he fits to perfection Fraser’s post-Saidian goal of helping to renew Mediterranean Studies by presenting travel images as “collaborative and dialogic... rather than... outside of and imposed upon the Mediterranean worlds” (p. 9).

A good deal of d'Ohsson's work for his *Tableau général de l'Empire Othoman* (Paris, 1787-1820), like that of Choiseul-Gouffier, was carried out in Paris. More than anything the role of such *auteurs* resembles that of a producer in today's cinema: arranging finance, juggling conflicting interests among sponsors, hiring and firing draftsmen and writers (actors and screenwriters), engravers (cinematographers), plate-makers and typesetters (film editors), printers, and secretariat (distributors). Demanding a method more drawn-out and labour-intensive than any painter's studio, Choiseul-Gouffier often had a team of thirty people working for him, while Cassas at the height of his project employed eighty.

D'Ohsson's *Tableau général* appears in Fraser's analysis much more aligned to the interests of the Sultanate than were the French authors' works. The dragoman offers precise descriptions and cultural explanations of customs and dress among the huge variety of peoples under Ottoman sovereignty. His non-judgemental approach is quite unlike Choiseul-Gouffiers' "protophilhellenic dissertations" (p. 27).

For readers who have seen the remarkable panoramic prints of Istanbul by Melling and wanted to know more, Fraser provides the answers. Her overall argument--that the Kahlruhe-born Melling should no longer be considered a European artist under Ottoman influence, but an actual Ottoman court artist--has great merit, especially when she comes to read the prints of the Yalis (great houses) on the Bosphorus waterfront as imbued with Ottoman ideas about prosperity and architectural style. But I think she goes too far in following Orhan Pamuk in his *Istanbul, Memories of the City*, who sees Melling as a late exponent of the Ottoman miniature in the age of print culture.[2] There is surely no miniature tradition of view-painting or of chorography (map-portraits of cities), in which exactitude and scale is important as it was to Melling. On the other hand, Fraser convincingly links Melling's panoramas of the Istanbul waterfront to the new practice of landscape murals painted by Turkish artists as palace decorations under Selim III. Behind both, it seems to me, were the waterfront *vedute* of the Venetians Canaletto and Guardi.

The colourful work of Louis Dupré's *Voyage à Athènes et à Constantinople* is the most satisfying in terms of aesthetic qualities. Perhaps because Dupré was a former student of J.-L. David and a figure-painter by profession, many of the large-scale, hand-coloured lithographs reproduced here have the character of portraits. Fraser is right to invoke the precedent of costume-albums (about which she is apparently preparing her next book) in his case. Dupré is the only artist here to use the new graphic technology of lithography, drawing directly on the stone (the prints being later hand-tinted, as Fraser discovers, by a certain gifted Mademoiselle Van Cuttsem). In their exactitude and savouring of "exotic" costume these prints remind one of Jean-Etienne Liotard's pastel Oriental portraits, but Dupré has a more volumetric approach to the body, especially those of the resplendent young men--largely Greeks and Albanians--in his pages. It is surprising that Fraser does not invoke the studies of David-school imagery of same-sex sociality (e.g. Abigail Solomon-Godeau's *Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation*, 1999 [3]) in discussing Dupré's ephebic Levantine dandies. What she does do to perfection however is explain the entangled web of ethnicities and political power at stake in the characters behind portraits like that of Ali Pasha, the governor of the Ionian Islands and effective overlord of what is now Greece (the vast Ottoman province of "Rumelia" at the time included Greece, all of the Balkans and beyond). Ali Pasha was an Albanian Muslim who spoke Greek in his court, and like his compatriot Mehmet Ali in Egypt, was one of the most powerful men in an Ottoman Empire actively attempting to modernise in the face of challenge from the European powers.

Fraser chooses not to go into the political history of the Greek War of Independence and the horror of the numerous massacres of civilians that took place on both sides, which included an "ethnic cleansing" of Turkish families long established in the Peloponnese (e.g. 30,000 killed in Tripolitsa in 1822), alongside the well-known grisly fate of Greeks on Aegean islands like Chios, Kasos, Rhodes and on the streets of Constantinople. I think a few well-placed remarks would have reminded the reader of the turbulent and bloody times in which these peaceable portrait prints were published, if not actually made (Dupré travelled in 1819-20; the war broke out in 1821, and the publication in stages was from 1825 for a decade). Dupré's book, the texts for which are fiercely Philhellenic, showed local elites of various ethnicities as people of culture and distinction, pictured at rest--a stark contrast to the fire and fury of contemporaneous history

paintings by European Philhellenes like Francois-Auguste Vinson, Eugène Delacroix, Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps, and others.

The final chapter, on Delacroix in Tangier, is out of step with the main body of the book, breaking the mould of discussions of the travel print, luxury books, and even the Ottoman Empire. Fraser, a noted Delacroix specialist, finishes with a new kind of art-making: Delacroix's well-known pencil and watercolour sketches of Morocco were hand-drawn in situ, usually in small notebooks, and were never intended for publication, but rather as fuel for future oil paintings. Morocco, an empire in its own right at the western end of the Mediterranean Sea, nevertheless presents thematic continuities for Fraser: the role of diplomacy as a trigger for artistic achievement, the French *peintre-voyageur* as an ethnographic *curieux*, and as a prime exponent of the iconography of alterity. But Delacroix was not the first artist in Tangier: Isidore Taylor published views of Tangier and Tetuan in 1827, while the prolific Scottish draftsman David Roberts made fine views of Tangier and Tetuan the year after Delacroix, published in Roscoe's *The Tourist in Spain and Morocco* (1838).[4]

Delacroix in Morocco of course has been subject to extensive (though never exhaustive) treatment, most notably by the Moroccan specialist Maurice Arama. While stressing the diplomatic angle quite rightly, Fraser doesn't draw sufficiently on the documents Arama has brought to light as an adjunct to his vast facsimile edition of the *Notebooks* or his more recent *Delacroix, Un voyage initiatique : Maroc, Andalousie, Algérie*, 2006).[5]

For this excellent book overall, my only real complaint is that there is too much of the aesthetic—too little imagery of these great books as material objects with prints up to three feet long, too little on the processes of printing (although its economic are well discussed). There are no close-ups of individual prints to get a sense of the grain of the engraving; no photographs of the leather-bound tomes or page-openings with a match-box to provide scale. Thus their materiality is abstracted and an opportunity for sensory context missed.

Nevertheless, in *Mediterranean Encounters* the reproduction quality, book design, and all-round presentation are superlative, equal to the best any American university press is able to offer. This was not the forté of Penn State publications until recent times, but they now appear to be setting the agenda. I should add that in reading this lengthy publication I did not detect a single typographical or other error. It flatters the senses to have an exceptionally well-presented, elegantly-written book dealing with the luxury market for prints by *peintres-voyageurs*, an industry that, as Fraser amply demonstrates, was at its apogee from the 1780s to the 1820s. It was superseded by the time of Maxime du Camp's 1852 *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie*, whose crystalline "dessins photographiques" relegated to the past the immense labour of artists like Cassas, Dupré, and their entourages.[6]

#### NOTES:

[1] Elisabeth A. Fraser, *Delacroix, Art, and Patrimony in Post-Revolutionary France* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2004).

[2] Orhan Pamuk, *Istanbul, memories and the city*, trans. Maureen Freely (New York: Knopf, 2006).

[3] Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1997).

[4] Thomas Roscoe, *The Tourist in Spain and Morocco. Illustrated from drawings by David Roberts* (London: Jennings, 1838).

[5] Maurice Arama, *Delacroix, Un voyage initiatique : Maroc, Andalousie, Algérie* (Paris: Non-Lieu, 1999).

[6] Maxime du Camp, *Egypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie: Dessins photographiques recueillis pendant les années 1849, 1850 et 1851* (Paris: Gide et J. Baudry, 1852).

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